

LISTEN

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH, OFFICE OF CONSUMER RELATIONS
Robert Bentley, Governor Zelia Baugh, Commissioner Volume 15, Number 3 Summer 2012

'20 years ago today' Recovery conference recalls two decades of fun, looks forward to more



The 20th annual Recovery Conference at Shocco Springs had a familiar feel to it – great speakers, relevant and invigorating workshops, a lively “Americana” themed Yard Sale, food

and entertainment put on by the Department’s Advocacy group, watermelons, dancing, the Talent Show – events that many conference-goers look forward to every year. But in 2012 we were also able to look back and realize that this unique and remarkable event, the first of its kind in the country, and something that seems to somehow just keep growing and getting better, has been held every year for 20 years! That’s a real accomplishment.

Paola del Vecchio came down from SAMSHA in Washington to share his experiences, and to remark on how he has personally witnessed the spirit of Alabama come alive over the past two decades. Joel Slack, founding director of the Office of Consumer Relations, was on hand to recall that first conference and other highlights, but also to encourage consumers to keep moving ahead and demand greatness in their lives and in the mental health systems in which they participate.

And so much more.

This special issue of LISTEN looks back at this year’s conference and captures in pictures many of the people and good times that were part of Recovery Conference 2012. Let’s enjoy this ... and get ready for the next 20 years!

Been here. Done that. —

Joel Slack addresses conference he helped start ‘20 years ago today’



Joel Slack was the first director of the Alabama Department of Mental Health’s Office of Consumer Relations. Alabama, in fact, had the first such office in the country, though all the other states have since that time followed Alabama’s

lead. One of the first things Slack did in his capacity as director was to hire Mike Autrey to assist him in his new work.

“I had been sitting around the house for ten years watching CNN, sinking lower and lower into depression,” Autrey said in his introduction of Slack as the conference’s

primary plenary speaker. “But when I met Joel he taught me about recovery. If it weren’t for him, I know I wouldn’t be alive today.”

Slack said so much had happened since he came to Alabama that he simply could not write a traditional presentation. Instead, he just wanted to take a walk through the memories shared by so many in the conference audience.

“One of the first things I suggested was that we start a conference, bring together hundreds of consumers in one place to have fun and learn about recovery,” Slack said. “Mike tried to talk me out of it. It just seemed so far out at the time. But just like women and people of color had been shut out of shared power in the workplace, it was the same way with mental health consumers. We really didn’t have a voice back then.”

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Slack had studied social change and he agreed to come to Alabama in February of 1990 only if he were hired into a top position with good money and staff and a real say-so. Alabama agreed and the great experiment was underway.

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Ed Drew has walked the walk— **Vet to Vet** addresses current crisis



As we learn more and more about both the physical and emotional scars that are following our fighting men and women home from Iraq and Afghanistan, mental health providers are also learning that a variety of treatment services are necessary. As our own consumer movement has long known, one of the most effective treat-

ments is peer support. No one can understand what you are going through as well as someone who has already been there and done that.

with others. It seeks to educate veterans through peer-to-peer mutual support. At the 2012 Recovery Conference in Shocco Springs, conferees were treated to a presentation by Vet to Vet alum Ed Drew. Drew's very informative address was also very personal and very moving. In essence, by telling his own story, Drew told the story of thousands like him, and showed what Vet to Vet is all about.

"I am a husband, a father, a grandfather and a great-grandfather," Drew said. "I volunteer in my community. And I volunteer with Vet to Vet. I am a Viet Nam combat veteran and today I am sane, safe, sober and stable. But it wasn't always that way."

Drew went on to describe how as a young man in Viet Nam he was stationed on Landing Zone (LZ) West Hill 89, and surrounded constantly by fierce fighting. The only thing that made it bearable was that Drew discovered a friend, a homeboy, from his hometown.

"One day an infantry company came to LZ Hill 89 for some R&R," Drew recalled. "Another of my buddies from back home was with them and he saw me and said it's a shame I wouldn't be home to see my baby born. Well, I had been incountry for over a year so I knew I wasn't the father. I decided to go kill myself. But Homeboy knew it and stuck with me. He saved me from myself."

Months later Drew was required to relocate a foxhole and Homeboy was there to help.

"I said thanks, and I'd see him after mail call. All of a sudden there was an explosion. Word raced across the Hill that someone had killed himself. It was Homeboy. He had gotten a Dear John letter and taken his life. All that was left was a pool of blood. He had saved me, but he didn't let me help him."

Back in the States, Drew's brother noticed his simmering anger. He told Ed he needed to calm down. But he didn't. With a new wife and family he still couldn't get focused. He lost every job he landed. He lost his business. He tried isolation but his children were still afraid of him. In order to pay a cable bill Drew pawned his television! Confusion reigned. He was asked by his wife to leave. He hit the streets. Ed Drew was homeless.

"I went to the VA on Sunday so I could eat dinner and I heard another vet tell his story, which I realized was my story," Drew explained. "I realized it was time to deal with my own PTSD, and that I now had a *passion* for the VA. I discovered Vet to Vet, and learned how it was based on the peer support model so often used in mental health. I went from PTSD to PTSDGrowth! And I have now trained over 100 people just like me."

"I am now sane, safe, sober and stable. I was proud to serve my country, and I would gladly do it again."

For more information on Vet to Vet, call Ed Drew in Tuskegee at 334.727.0550, or visit the organization's website at www.vet2vetusa.org.

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ments is peer support. No one can understand what you are going through as well as someone who has already been there and done that.

This is the basic premise of a national organization called Vet to Vet. Its mission is to address a broad range of emotional, spiritual, educational, vocational, transitional, real and present needs of veterans.

Vet to Vet provides a way for recovering veterans who have been through the same or similar experiences to share these

Now a thriving artist—

Carlson has experienced war, disruption

Pretty much anyone who has attended the Shocco Springs Recovery Conference over the past few years has had his or her picture taken by the conference's unofficial staff photographer, Paul Carlson. Paul is a fascinating individual,

by turns humorous and philosophical, witty yet wise. He has lived a dozen lifetimes in one, and is a man of many talents. Most notably, Paul is combines the skills of an artist and a craftsman. He can fix about anything, be it electrical or mechanical, and he is accomplished in many art forms —

wood, metal, sculpture, painting, drawing, photography, you name it. But mostly he is just a good guy, working on his own recovery and helping others work on theirs.

Paul was in the audience when Ed Drew recollected his experiences in Viet Nam. Paul has a few memories of his own. Growing up in a large, musical family in the Midwest, Paul set out on his own and soon joined the United States Navy. He spent a little over eight years in the service, from 1950 to 1959. These dates obviously include the three years our country spent fighting the Korean War, often called "The Forgotten War."

Carlson was in the thick of it as a mechanic on a naval destroyer in the South China Sea. His ship served primarily as naval artillery for its in-country infantry allies, but Carlson well remembers being fired on from shore by enemy guns.

"There was also a good deal of anti-submarine warfare, and once in response to that threat we were forced to shut down our ship in open waters," he said. "That was the most stressful part of it all

— just sitting, waiting, and not knowing what would happen next."

Much of what happened out there Carlson cannot or will not share. Much of it is classified information. He is proud of his service of course, but he also has mixed feelings about how it all turned out. One issue he has is that the Navy lost many of his service records, which has denied him certain benefits. Another thing is the way the war and its servicemen have been "forgotten" by historians. But it's not something he wishes to discuss in detail.

In his four years aboard various ships, Carlson once went for a period of 44 straight days without seeing any daylight. He was situated below deck all day, only briefly being allowed topside late at night. And the Navy noticed young Carlson's strength and daring, sending him a total of 16 times on the "high line" between aircraft carriers and his own destroyer to make various repairs. This was a lot for a 22 year old to handle.

"More than once I feel from the high line into the China Sea," he said. "It's a long way up there, but it's a longer way down. It's a wonder I lived through all of that."

Upon his civilian discharge, Carlson pretty much went wild. He engaged in high platform diving, auto and motorcycle racing, riding bulls in rodeos, just waiting for someone to cross him. Few people dared to. He was also drinking and fighting and living any way he could think of. He got divorced from his wife.



He became estranged from his family. His alcoholism affected his health, and he had a pancreatic emergency in the early 1960s. The doctors saw that he was down to just 115 pounds and left him for dead.

"Well, I'm still here," he said. "Since that day in the hospital I have never had another drink or another cigarette. I'm 82 years old, I have plenty of health problems as would anyone who was my age and had lived the kind of life I have, but I

"I have discovered plenty of reasons to live. I spent a lot of time destroying myself and hurting others. I spent a lot of time tearing things down. So now for the past 30 years I have been building, creating, growing my mind and spirit through art. And I try to share that any way I can. I've been there. I've done all there is to do. All I want now is to help others see the beauty in life that it took me so long to find."

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Visionary Guild a big part of Consumer Relations legacy—

Art and poetry retreat held in East Alabama



"Her style is one of inspiration," Richey said. "The artists see that she has no arms or legs, yet her spirit is one of real joy and strength. I don't know how to describe it except to say that she teaches by inspiration."

The Visionary Guild of Mentally Ill Artists hosted an art and poetry retreat in Opelika on May 14. Event organizer and Visionary Guild president Sylvia Richey said a half-dozen poets were in residence, as well as over two dozen graphic artists.

The poetry section was directed by George Littleton, while the art portion was directed by Becky Guinn (see separate story on Guinn in this issue).

The poets studied a variety of short lyrics by both English and American authors, and took a special look at John Keats's haunting narrative "La Belle Dame Sans Merci."

The poets—who included C.C. Sistrunk, Sharon Aldridge, Kent Newberry, Daniel Craddock, Martha Wilkerson, and Eric

Pyron – noted the many images of mental illness and "visions and voices" that are part of Keats's famous verse. In addition, the poets focused on images of renewal and recovery, and wrote poems reflecting their own ideas of recovery and what it means to start afresh and leave bad baggage behind.

The following day the poems were re-written in bold and beautiful calligraphy script and then matted and framed.

The artists had a much larger group and produced a wide variety of colorful and joyful images. Art director Becky Guinn clearly had a gift for connecting with the students. Sylvia Richey said that by the end of the first day's session the artists felt as if they

had known Guinn for years.

"Her style is one of inspiration," Richey said. "The artists see that she has no arms or legs, yet her spirit is one of real joy and strength. I don't know how to describe it except to say that she teaches by inspiration."



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The Office of Consumer Relations
The Alabama Department of Mental Health
RSA Union • 100 N. Union Street
P.O. Box 301410
Montgomery, Alabama 36130-1410
(334) 242-3456
1-800-832-0952
Fax: (334) 242-3025



Lost arms and legs as an adult—

Becky Guinn teaches about art, life

At the May 14 Visionary Guild Art and Poetry Retreat, painting students got a special treat when they were led by accomplished watercolorist Becky Guinn. Originally from Cedartown, Ga., Guinn was inspired by her fourth grade teacher who, in her words, “incorporated art into everything we did in every subject.” It was this early experience that made her know she wanted to be an artist.

“I got my degree in Art Education at Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tenn.,” Guinn said. “It was there that I met and married my husband David Guinn. He was an art minor and we agreed that we would get along best if he worked in graphite and I worked in color,” she said with a laugh.

Actually, David was also a top-notch wrestler and he began a career in recreational ministries with the Southern Baptist Convention. The couple lived in Florida, Mississippi, and Birmingham before David entered seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas.

“We were at Baylor University for 20 years, where David ran the largest college ministry in the country,” Guinn said. “I painted a lot of bathrooms, but wasn’t able to do much art. But in 1982 I began teaching art in private academies before moving here to Valley, Alabama in 1992. Since I moved here I have been teaching in the Chambers County Public School system.”

In January 2003, Guinn entered the hospital for a cardiac procedure. By mistake, she was given a blood clotting agent instead of a blood thinner. As a result, she lost both arms and legs to amputation. But after only six days of rehab she was back in the classroom. “The students are the main reason I went back to the classroom,” she said. “They just see me for who I am.”

“Since I could no longer remove the tubes and caps of paints, I began working exclusively in watercolor,” Guinn said. “I got tired of waiting on people to help me so I just started helping myself.”

She retired from the Chambers County system in 2008. She was selected as the National Art Educator Special Needs Teacher of the Year in 2010.

“I’m not a special ed teacher,” she said. “But I did start a business called Hooked on Art. I turned my van into a mobile art studio and take this program on the road. With my colleague Beck Cairns, we are working more and more with people with disabilities and I really love it.”

“You get hugs, and it makes you feel good. We are really able to connect through art and a kind of shared experience, I believe. We all struggle through life, and a visual image can say things that words cannot express.”

“I can tell you that when we do these programs we see ability and not disability. And I know we get more out of it that the students do. The students make the connections and it is all good. I couldn’t be happier with the way things turned out.”

"It was very tough at first," he said. "It was not easy. My role was to articulate the patient's perspective to top Department management and frankly, a lot of those people did not want to hear about that."

But just as the top corporations really listen to their customers, Slack and Autry and friends forced the Department to make room.

"It started off with me just sitting alone in the office, but then we started our toll-free consumer hotline and the phone started ringing off the hook," Slack said. "I had to have some help so we posted a job notice stating that the candidate had to have experienced a serious mental illness, just like I had. Now that was a real change – it used to be that was what *prevented* you from getting a good job!"

No one in those days had ever heard of a mental health consumer. No one considered that recovery was part of the treatment process. If you had a mental illness you couldn't get a driver's license. It was just a whole different world. Slack and his team, which now included the indispensable Janet Jackson, took on all of those fights.

"We fought Public Safety and got that changed," Slack said. "We started a consumer advocacy organization, just trying to build a coalition. But we were winging it. We realized that we needed a statewide conference to make some of these things happen."

Slack went on to explain how so many things came into being. Carole Eskridge had a dream of bringing together mentally ill artists. With the help of Slack's office, the Visionary Guild was born and still thrives to this day. The job of advocates was to point out insensitive or careless caregivers and administrators. But how do you recognize good ones? The RESPECT Awards! Slack and his colleagues also started up drop-in centers around the state, but they needed a channel to really hear what consumers thought and needed. That's where the Directions Council came from. How can

we communicate all this to Alabama consumers? Through a newsletter. LISTEN has been published now on a quarterly basis for nearly 20 years running.

"And it all comes together here, at this conference," Slack said. "This is the best manifestation of what we do and what we can do. I'll never forget that first Talent Show on the stage at Montevallo. But they wanted us to move on, plus we ran out of room there, and that's when we met Wendy Westerhouse at Shocco Springs. And boy have we ever felt welcome here! We consumers haven't always felt welcome but these people always go above and beyond. They are the best. The watermelons. The dance. The candlelight vigil – we think we have to carry garbage around with us from our past but when

"A good therapist will tell you that if want to move on with your life, you've got to make peace with your past. That's we're here to do now, and what we have been doing now for 20 years. We're putting our past behind us, and building a positive future together. I am happy and proud to have been a small part of this great thing."

we write those things down and place them in the burn barrel, it's a powerful symbol. The more we throw in, the higher the flames, and the higher go our spirits. It all happens here. The memories are overwhelming."

Slack also recalled the many speakers at the conference who consistently said that medications were not the be-all and end-all of mental health treatment. People must first be at peace with themselves. People are designed to get well, to recover.

"It works like this: Grab God's hand.



Grab a consumer's hand. Pull up. Repeat."

Slack said it's important to remember that even though the Recovery Conference – and it has always been called the Recovery Conference – is a lot of fun, it's not about you.

"It's about helping others," he said. "It's kind of like church. The point is to go out and lend a hand and spread the word. Remember Sylvia Richey and Shirley Hagar putting on the 'Looking good, feeling good' workshop? Taking care of yourself inside and out is important. There's way more to it than just meds. And how about the Cahaba group from Selma? I've seen them coalesce under the leadership of Lewis Fincher and _____. Great guys! Great group."

Slack recalled his days when he was just out of the hospital.

"People were identified not as people, but by their diagnosis. A girl might ask who I was and I'd tell her about my diagnosis and she'd be gone. I wonder why? But now I realize that I am Joel, not a schizophrenic. A good therapist will tell you that if want to move on with your life, you've got to make peace with your past. That's we're here to do now, and what we have been doing now for 20 years. We're putting our past behind us, and building a positive future together. I am happy and proud to have been a small part of this great thing."

2012 **RESPECT AWARD** Winners



Davey Chastang, LGSW, Therapist, Rehab & Day Treatment Team Leader, AltaPointe Health Systems, Mobile

Theresesa Davis, LGSW, Home Coordinator, Salerno, JBS Mental Health Authority, Birmingham

Jerome Dorsey, Peer Specialist, JBS Mental Health Authority, Birmingham

Michael Falligant, Executive Director, Crisis Center, Inc., Birmingham

Leigh Few, Coordinator, Murphy House, Jasper

Jim Hickman, Home Therapist, MHC of Madison County, Huntsville

Matt Hilyer, Director, JBS Person-Centered Outplacement Program (POP), JBS Mental Health Authority, Birmingham

Rico James, Clinical Assistant to the Medical Director, JBS Mental Health Authority, Birmingham

Vincent Jones, Custodian, MHC of Madison County, Huntsville

Dan Lawson, Therapist, Eastside Mental Health, Birmingham

Donna Long, ADS Schedule Coordinator, East Alabama Mental Health Center, Opelika

Sgt. Montoya Madden, Police Officer, Taylor Hardin Secure Medical Facility, Tuscaloosa

Laci McCafferty, LGSW, Social Worker II, Taylor Hardin Secure Medical Facility, Tuscaloosa

Ellyn Rosenbeck, Consumer Specialist, Marion County Mental Health, Hamilton

Shelly Sills, Program Coordinator, Dutton Group Homes, Mountain Lakes Behavioral Healthcare, Guntersville

Jean Spicer, Family & Children's Service Director, East Alabama Mental Health, Opelika

Sonya Stevens, Admissions, North Alabama Regional Hospital, Decatur

Greg Thompson, Case Manager, Madison County Mental Health Center, Huntsville

Brittany Wiggins, Mental Health of America, Montgomery

Yolanda Wright, HTC III, Searcy Hospital, Mt. Vernon



2012 Hope Award Winner

Dr Richard Craig

Recovery Conference 2012—

TALENT SHOW

lights up the night

The theme of the 2012 Recovery Conference at Shocco Springs – 20 Years Ago Today – reflects with pride the fact that it has been two full decades since the Office of Consumer Relations started its great tradition of holding an annual Recovery Conference. Many things have remained constant over those 20 years, including the fellowship, education, and inspiration that are always part of the event. But another part of the conference has remained steady, as well: the opening night Talent Show.

Way back in 1992, at the University of Montevallo, Joel Slack sat on a stool, strumming a guitar, cracking a few jokes, and told the gathered crowd on the first night of the conference that we were here to share, not judge. We were here to laugh with each other, and not at anyone. We were here to have fun together, and to encourage our fellow consumers to get up and show what they could do. Well, that invitation became what we now know as the Talent Show that always kicks off the first night of the conference. We have enjoyed wonderful music, poetry, comedy and skits, and seen some great friends and leaders come and go in those years. Those who were there will never forget the gifted pianist and singer Theron Handy, or talented musician and friend Sam Schillaci, or the fun-loving and ever-natural comedienne Geneva McManus.

The tradition rolls on. At this, the 20th annual Recovery Conference Talent Show,

we again enjoyed Hazel Moore's terrific piano playing and singing and down-home jokes as she welcomed scores of performers to the big stage in the Shocco Springs Chapel. She started with a group sing-along before she asked the crowd a question.

"How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb? Well, it only takes one, but first the lightbulb's gotta want to be changed!"

This type of humor came and went between acts all night long, but the main thing was the acts.

The show started out when talented writer and recording artist Ben Arthur sang "Haven of Hope," the original composition he played before Gov. Bob Riley and hundreds of others at the new Bryce Hospital groundbreaking ceremony: "Brick by brick we'll build it up right / It's a haven of hope that's well within sight." Ben was persuaded to sing an en-

core, selecting his song "Top of the Hill."

Another talented musician who is familiar to Alabama consumers came next. Steve Pendergrass sang a song that he had just recently penned. As is typical of Steve, it was a narrative of Jesus, based on John 3:16, using the metaphor of Jesus as a rock. Those who know Steve also know that he is a rock.

Margaret Forrest came next in what for many was the most memorable performance of the evening. Dressed as the dynamic Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz, Forrest sang a song from the Broadway musical *The Wiz* which was based on Frank Baum's book and the world-famous film. The song was "When I Think of Home" and she did it up right, wearing a blue calico dress, holding a straw basket, a Toto dog on a leash, and of course wearing the classic red ruby slippers. Simply unforgettable.

Jan Bush has her own great sense





of humor and when the sound man couldn't find her music, she just laughed and made a few jokes and then busted out with George & Ira Gershwin's classic "Summertime." Forget a few words? No problem. She just laughed her way through it, much in the same way Ella Fitzgerald did when, in a live recording, she forgot the words to "Mack The Knife." If Ella can do it, so can Jan Bush.

Everyone knows Helen Bishop, and "Every Rose Has Its Thorn" was the song Helen chose to sing. The song was full of poignant but painful imagery, and Helen got a lot of help from the crowd. That's always a good thing to see.

Everyone's favorite religious poet, Jan McCurdy, followed up with a series of three quick poems that were both autobiographical and inspirational. Jan always finds a way to lift up the people at Shocco Springs.

Teresa John also read a poem, this one about how pets have the kind of love that never runs out and we humans should take notice. Eric Adams then continued a piano performance streak he has had going for the past few years as he concentrated on a serious classical sound that all of a sudden exploded into some serious rhythm and blues. If you didn't know better you would have thought that Jerry Lee Lewis was on the stage. Way to go, Eric!

It was a tough act to follow, but Jackie Goodman came along and sang a song declaring "a hero lies within you," and that was followed up by a quick joke from Mary McPhillips.

And if there were ever two guys who love everyone they meet, it is twins Roy and Troy Chisam who have lit up the conference for years with their upbeat attitudes. Taking turns, syllable by syllable, the twins worked their way through "Amazing Grace" and "Oh How I Love Jesus." Troy, of course, also mentioned his love of the green Bay Packers. You just can't keep these good men down.

Barbara Jones read her poem called "The Time Is Now" about how God has a plan for each of us, and the long verse raised a lot of spontaneous "Amen's!" from the crowd. It continued as a Jones thing when Nancy Jones sang - with a lot of help from the enthusiastic crowd - "You Light Up My Life."



Ruth Miller sang a nice a capella soprano medley of three religious songs, followed up by Thoris Turner's poetic recitation of "Cry of the Mentally Ill." Melanie Gipson kept the mood pretty serious when she sang a song she had recently sung at a friend's funeral, though she pointed out that it was a happy song in itself. She did a terrific job on "What A Day That Will Be!" and then got the crowd going when she added another number, "Your Love Keeps Lifting Me Higher." There was lots of crowd clapping on that one.

When Deandra Garner from Huntsville followed up with her song, "My Love Is Yours Baby," a huge dance party broke

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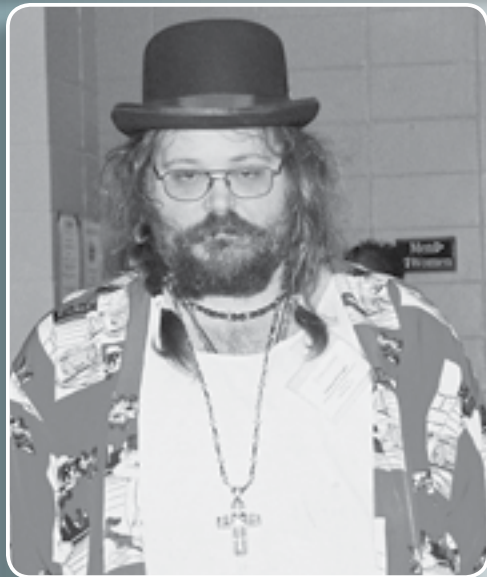
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2012 Recovery Conference

Talent Show

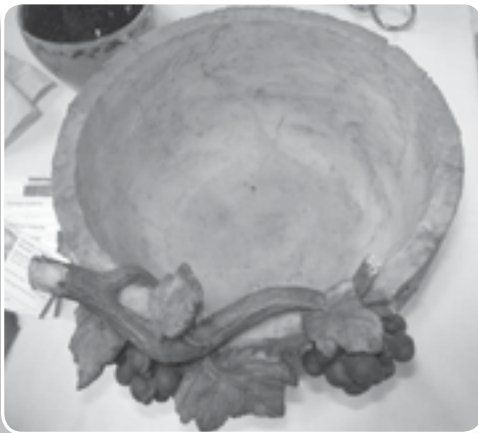




RECOVERY CON



CONFERENCE 2012





out but, in deference to the Shocco Chapel rules, Hazel Moore shut it down with some good humor and a laugh. Another Huntsvillian, Rickey Lee Hammons, shared his spiritual autobiography with the crowd and then James Dorsey did the same thing, only he followed up his testimony with a stirring Gospel number that set the place on fire. Everyone was shouting. He stopped mid-song for more scripture and preaching. It was just a major stage show that got everyone involved in a good way.

Patricia Rogers kept the "Baptist Thing" going with her good solid piano playing before Kim Bannister cooled things down with a couple of sharply-rhymed and interlinked poems. Hanceville's Angela Spann then *boomed* out an upbeat number about *not* losing your soul. She took the crowd along with her every step of the way. The gathered group was then treated to some old-school blues style guitar licks from Hanceville's own James Brown ("Blue Monday"). Someone nailed it from the crowd when they called James "The Godfather of Blues!" He was really good.

Otis Tony Boggs from the Friendship Club came on stage next to share a long rhyming Easter poem he had written. O'Neal Lewis, another Friendship Club member, then delivered his very lively "clean rap" and announced his forthcoming CD release from Dawg House Entertainment. He closed with these good words: "The haters can't knock me down!" The Friendship Club continued on when Demetrece Watson and Verdell

Smith sang the strong duet "My Home Is In Gloryland," with Demetrece on piano, to great crowd approval.

Lisa Lynch came next with an a cappella Gospel number – "Because He Lives" -- that lifted up the gathering in spite of being slow and sad. Teresa Eldridge then preached to the crowd about the need to face our struggles and not complain. "If you get a light bill you can't pay, just remember that many folks don't have any lights." She dedicated this meditation to a cousin who had died that week from a diabetic seizure.

Shirley Crockett then recited a story-poem she basically wrote on the spot about the importance of time. "Tall" Paul Thomas then came on stage with hat and cane and sang a really pretty song loudly and proudly. And he got a lot of love from the crowd for his efforts. Another Friendship Club member, Abdul Robinson, shared his poem's message that it is God's grace that will last in this lifetime.

Many longtime Shocco Springs conferees know Joe Faught for his original and complex lyrical poems, and this year's selection was no different. Entitled "Silver Wax Moonbeams to an Unknown Dreamlike Shore" was simply non-stop dreamy visions and imagery that was perfect for the night, which was now well past 10 pm. Another perennial performer, George Higginbotham, strummed and sang a song about friendship that he dedicated to an absent friend. And speaking of vigilant friends, Barnetta Eberhart followed up with "His Eyes On The Sparrow." That you, Barnetta!

John Allen, as he did last year, told his personal story and pulled off some magic acts from his big bag of tricks. Kristi Connell from Dothan then shared her poem, asking God to help her through the hard times, before Kevin Black sang a song about the importance of getting a second chance and never giving up. He said he heard the song in the hospital and knows what it meant to him.

As the night finally came to a close, a few late-signing artists came on, including Lineville's Melissa Coleman who sang a country song dedicated to her people at Cheaha Mental Health. She declared that "I'm glad God saved my life!!"

Mary Dolberry and Coery — then shared a dynamic duet with the late night hangers-on, which was followed up by Chris Mann's "knock knock" jokes. Thaddeus James Cooper sang the Lord's Prayer, dedicated to Jesus and the good of humanity. It was late, the place was almost empty, but he was good. Really good.

Alvin Moore kept in the spirit, just preaching, but wanting those few souls remaining to really know one thing: "God loves you!"

Andre Carroll from Dothan wrapped up the night with the 1970s Bill Withers classic "Lean On Me."

It was a fitting end to a night that started ... how long ago?

"It was 20 years ago today!"



Andre Carroll from Dothan wrapped up the night with the 1970s Bill Withers classic "Lean On Me."

It was a fitting end to a night that started ... how long ago? "It was 20 years ago today!"

Support Groups & Consumer Advocacy Organizations

Statewide

Wings Across Alabama

P.O. Box 211286
Montgomery, AL 36121
(334) 395-7616 or
Toll Free: 888-WINGSAL(946-4725)

The Visionary Guild for Mentally Ill Artists

Sylvia Richey, President
c/o Carole Eskridge, Foundress
For information Call
(334) 703-3853 OR (256) 429-8697

Alabama Minority Consumer Council

Fannie Hicks President
(334) 529-3967

Alabama Peer Specialist Association (APSA)

Sheila Scott President
(205) 552-5214

Region I

Albertville Soul Survivors

Yvonne Jones, President
Meets last Fridays 4:00 PM
Albertville, AL 35950
(256) 293-2268

Anniston Emotions Anonymous

c/o Roy Chisam, President
Meets Monday-Thursday 9:00-10:00 AM
Calhoun-Cleburne MHC
(256) 237-3796

Anniston NAMI Connection

Contact Sara Parfait (256)276-8834 or
Hazel Moore @ 256-831-7165
Meets Thursdays 2:00 PM
The Galley in The Tyler Center
731 Leighton Ave, Anniston
Saraparfait@bellsouth.net

Athens Consumer Outreach

Steve Pendergrass, President
Meets 2nd Tuesdays at 12:00 noon
Athens-Limestone Counseling Center
1307 E. Elm St., Athens, AL
For more info call Steve at (256) 771-1613

Boaz Angels Outreach

Ann Jenkins, President
Meets 3rd Thursdays at 11:00 AM
Boaz, AL 35957
(256) 593-2374

Cullman R.E.S.T.T.

Nancy Jester, President
Meets 3rd Friday at 1521 McNabb
Cullman, AL 35055
For additional info call Nancy (256) 347-4008

Cullman Wallace Support Group

Roberta Armstrong, President
Meets 2nd & 4th Thursday at 6:30 PM
Wallace State Community College
81 Main St. NW, Hanceville, AL
Tom Bevell Building, Room 608
(256) 734-8169

Decatur DBSA Morgan County

c/o Sue Brantley
MHA in Morgan County
(256) 353-1160
Meets 2nd & 4th Thursday at 6:30 PM
MHA Office 207 Commerce Circle SW
Decatur, AL 35602

Decatur The Serenity Group

Elizabeth Volonino, President
Meets 3rd Wednesdays at 10:00 AM
North Central MHC
4110 Highway 31 S., Decatur, AL
(256) 355-5348

Florence Shoals Sharing Group

Corey Holmes, President
Meets 1st & 3rd Sundays at 2:00 PM
North Wood United Methodist Church
Florence, AL 35630
(256) 765-2081

Huntsville DBSA Huntsville

Dave Hepler, President
Meets Thursday at 6:00 PM
United Way Building
701 Andrew Jackson Way
Huntsville, AL
(256) 539-1411

Huntsville MHCA in Huntsville

Helen Bishop, President
Meets 1st Mondays at 1:00 PM
Our Place Drop-In Center
205 Max Luther Dr. Huntsville
(256) 704-9133

Moulton Hogohegee Consumer Wellness Center

Doris Smith, President
Meets last Monday of each month at 6:00 PM
John's Bar-B Que
15165 Court St. Moulton, AL
(256) 566-3315

Centre NAMI Connection/Centre

Contacts: Paul & Suzanne Theis
Meets Tuesdays at 6:30 PM
First Baptist Church ROC
300 East Bypass
Centre, AL 35960
256-779-5794
ptconstruction@tds.net

Region II

Bessemer Free Spirit Consumer Group, Inc.

Paul Irvin, President
Meets Tuesdays at 10:00 AM
Board Room Suite 201
UAB West, 985 9th Avenue SW
Bessemer
(205) 481-8562
Facilitator: Lisa Burks

Birmingham

The Sharing Group of Birmingham

c/o Jesse Stinson, President
(205) 592-9773; 1-800-537-3806
(205) 592-9774 FAX
Meets: Sunday 6:00 PM
South Highland Presbyterian Church
2035 Highland Ave.

The Sharing Group/Hill Crest

Friday 6:00 PM
Hill Crest Hospital
6869 5th Ave South

The Sharing Group/Wednesday

Wednesday 2:00 PM
South Highland Presbyterian Church
2035 Highland Ave.

The Sunday Club

Sunday 2:00 PM
South Highland Presbyterian Church
2035 Highland Ave.

Birmingham Recovery, Inc.

Judy Fleck, President
Meets Saturday 2:00 PM
Southside Library
11th Ave, Five Points South
Birmingham
(205) 918-0746

Birmingham Young Adult Sharing Group

Meets Wednesday 9:00 AM
Mountain Brook Community Church
3001 Highway 280 E
Birmingham, AL
(205) 886-7553
yasggham@gmail.com; www.yasg.org

Birmingham NAMI Connection/Birmingham

Contacts: William Ruff, (205) 566-8681,
cosmicray3@yahoo.com
Vickey (205) 933-6955
NAMI Birmingham, (205) 327-3777

NAMI Connection/Birmingham/Group 1

Tuesday at 12:30 PM, The 1920 Club
1920 10th Ave. South

NAMI Connection/Birmingham/Group 2

Monday at 7:00 PM
700 28th St South

Eutaw NAMI Connection/Eutaw

Meets Thursdays at 10:00
West Alabama Mental Health Center
301 Prairie Ave. Eutaw
Contact: Maurika Walton
205-482-8534
mlwalton27@gmail.com

Helena Recovery International

c/o Cliff Bennett
Meets Fridays at 10:00 AM
Helena United Methodist Church
2035 Highway 38
(205) 685-0520

Selma Cahaba Consumer Affairs Committee

Meets 2nd Tuesday & 4th Thursday 6:30 PM
Cahaba Consumer Affairs Drop-in Center
302 Franklin St., Selma
(334) 875-9911 or (334) 418-6525 M-F 1:00-6:00
www.cahabaconsumeraffairs.com

Tuscaloosa Emotions Anonymous

Meets Monday-Thursday 9:00 AM
Friendship House
505 19th Ave. N.
Tuscaloosa
(205) 345-1534

Tuscaloosa The Moodies (DBSA)

Anne Lynch, President
Meets 2nd Thursday 7:00 PM
Friendship House
505 19th Ave. N.
Tuscaloosa
(205) 345-4561
www.moodies.org

Tuscaloosa DBSA Tuscaloosa County/Pathfinders

Meets Tuesday 6:00 PM
Trinity United Methodist Church
729 Paul W. Bryant Dr. East, Tuscaloosa
(205) 826-3642

Tuscaloosa Support for Recovery/Tuscaloosa

Meets 3rd Sunday 4:00 PM
(205) 292-5438 almon205@aol.com

Region III

Montgomery DBSA Montgomery (2 Groups)

Meets 1st Thursday 7:00 AM
Frazier United Methodist Church and
3rd Saturday 12:00 noon
Montgomery Public Library
245 High & McDonough St
For more information contact
Clairepatrese (334) 652-1431

Auburn/Opelika Revelations of Self

Kathleen Royce, President
Meets last Friday of each month 6:30 PM
Frank Brown Rec. Center
235 Opelika Rd, Auburn
(334) 741-0228

Auburn/Opelika Center of Hope

Meets 1st Mondays, 12:30 PM
2300 Center Hill Drive, Bldg. #1
Opelika, AL 36274
For more information contact
Sylvia at (334) 703-3853 or 742-2124

Region IV

Dothan NAMI Connection/Dothan

Contact: Adele Morgan
334-702-2952
Meets Thursdays at 6:30 PM
Mt. Gilead Baptist Church
2864 Brannon Stand Rd., Dothan
Groups are held in Family Life Center
334-702-2952
Milton626@aol.com

Mobile Schizophrenics Anonymous/Mobile

Meets 3rd Tuesdays 11:00 AM
Government Street Presbyterian Church, Mobile
(251) 438-5928



Alabama Department of Mental Health
Office of Consumer Relations
RSA Union • 100 N. Union Street
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Montgomery, Alabama 36130-1410

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ALABAMA CONSUMER-RUN DROP-IN CENTER LOCATIONS



FRIENDSHIP HOUSE

505 19th Avenue
Tuscaloosa, AL 35401
(205) 345-1534
Open Monday - Thursday,
8:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

THE 1920 CLUB

1920 10th Avenue South
Birmingham, AL 35205
Open Monday - Friday, 10:00 - 3:00 p.m.
Call (205) 933-6955

CAHABA DROP-IN CENTER

302 Franklin Street
Selma, AL
Open 1:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. daily
(334) 418-6525 (Clubhouse number)
If no answer, call (334) 875-1850
www.cahabaconsumeraffairs.com

SO-MI CENTER

4351 Midmost Drive
Mobile, AL 36609
(251) 342-0261
Open Monday - Friday,
7:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

OUR PLACE

205 Max Luther Drive,
Huntsville, AL
Open Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and
Fridays from 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Open Thursdays from 1:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.
For more information call (256) 746-4145

CLEAR VIEW

308 Chisholm Street
Montgomery, AL
Open Tuesdays and Thursdays
12:00 noon - 5:00 p.m.
Call (334) 239-7448 for further information

To find out more about how to start a drop-in center in your area, call the Office of Consumer Relations at 1 (800) 832-0952.